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Memory Research and Possibilities of Japan-U.S. Reconciliation: Moderator's Opening and Closing Comments

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Introduction

This year's NASS, organized around the unified theme "Toward a Common Memory of Our Past," focuses on memories of war and the question of reconciliation. In particular, there are long-standing divisions between Japanese and American memories of World War II-era events such as Pearl Harbor, on the one hand, and Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on the other, and a central theme of this conference will be how to overcome these divisions and to allow common memories and reconciliation to become possible. Fortunately, the three keynote speeches planned for this plenary session all deal with memories of World War II, so I think we can look forward to this common thread running throughout the session.

Moreover, this year is notable as marking the 50th anniversary of the 1960 revision of the Japan-US Security Treaty, and has seen both countries searching for a redefinition of their relationship. Although political realities have made it difficult under the postwar bilateral alliance to freely discuss some aspects of the divisions between Japanese and American memories of the war, there have been continual calls from the victims of the U.S. atomic bombings and air raids for America to apologize and offer compensation. From the other side, some of the Americans who were subject to forced labor and abuse as Japanese prisoners of war have continually called upon the Japanese government to offer an apology and compensation. Unlike the situation in Japan's relations with China and South Korea, differing memories of the war have not become an open issue in relations between the Japanese and US governments, but, as we have seen, remain an issue at the citizen level. This continuing gap in popular perceptions makes attempts to create even limited "common memories" extremely important as the two countries seek to redefine the nature of their relationship. I think this makes the theme of this plenary session very timely.

I. The Significance of the Rise in Memory Research

Memory research has become a thriving field in both Japan and the United States since the 1990s, not only in history, but in a wide variety of fields such as literature, philosophy, and cultural studies. Two spurs to this research were the publication of *Imagined Communities,* by Benedict Anderson, and *The Invention of Tradition,* edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, in 1983. These two books argued that modern nation-state consciousness did not spring up naturally on its own, but was intentionally created by governments. In the years since, there has been an upsurge in research illuminating the created nature of modern nationalism, focusing on topics such as monuments, historical anniversaries, and history education, as well as in research on the nature of memory.

In addition, by gradually beginning since the 1980s to discuss their horrible experiences during World War II that they had long suppressed, people such as Holocaust survivors and former so-called comfort women have had a major impact. Survivors of unspeakably horrible experiences such as war will generally try to reclaim a degree of calm by forgetting those experiences because of their traumatic nature. With the passage of several decades since the end of the war, however, survivors have also become older and many of them --out of remembrance for their friends who have passed on or out of a desire for others to not have to go through the same harsh experiences they did-- have made the difficult decision to speak about their experiences, and I think their shocking revelations have played a major role in the rise of oral history and memory research.

The upsurge in memory research has brought about major changes not only in military history, but in the nature of historical research as a whole. First, war research had traditionally focused --naturally enough-- on wartime, but the rise in memory research and studies of how people remember wartime events in later periods brought about cross-linkages between wartime and postwar periods, leading to a chronological expansion in war research.

Second, the testimony of war victims who had previously kept silent has naturally forced a rewriting of what had been "official histories" based largely on government-centered written records. In the United States, for example, the Redress Movement that arose in the 1970s demanding compensation for the Japanese-Americans who were forcibly interned during World War II won an apology and compensation from the government. As a result, the interpretation that the Japanese-American internment was a "military necessity" was fundamentally revised, and the new interpretation that the internment was the result of wartime hysteria and racial prejudice took root in its place.

Third, a new area of research has arisen, examining how memories of one war impacted the next one. For example, as I pointed out in my own 2008 work *Belligerent Republic* (*Kosen no kyowakoku,* Iwanami Shinsho), Woodrow Wilson

was the first Southerner elected president after the Civil War and, perhaps because many of his own relatives had died in the war, he at first had an interest in the peace movement, and cooperated with the movement to establish an international court of arbitration. With no choice but to lead America into taking part in World War I despite this background, he used strained idealistic justifications in the process, calling the conflict "the war to end all wars," for example. This point illustrates the current-day nature of memory, and shows how memory is always being revised to meet the demands of the current situation.

II. Does Memory Research Foster Reconciliation?

As we have seen, memory research has opened many new areas of intellectual pursuit, but can it play a role in creating common memories between the people of nations, which were formerly at war, and in reconciliation? Considering that memory research overlaps with the studies that criticize modern nationalism as something that was consciously created, it does involve excavating transnational memories. Memory research, however, often has the effect of strengthening nationalism by focusing attention on the deaths of large numbers of people in one's own nation. This reminds us that memory research by itself cannot necessarily provide us with the kind of perspective needed to overcome nationalism.

As demonstrated, however, by the fact that in Europe the production of common history textbooks proceeded in tandem with moves toward European integration, Japan and the United States may become more able to re-examine their own history once steps such as the creation of an Asian Union and increased cooperation among Asian-Pacific countries take place. While many modern wars have taken place between nation states, often strengthening nationalism in each of the countries involved, the human damage caused by war has a transnational dimension that is not confined by national boundaries. As a result, an important consideration in constructing transnational memories is whether people can feel empathy as fellow human beings toward war victims from other countries. This is a question of whether the feeling of mourning for the dead can be expanded across national borders.

III. Moderator's Final Remarks

Listening to the presentations and discussion at this symposium, I was struck by the fact that even today, 65 years after the end of World War II, there is still a wide gap between Japanese and American memories of Pearl Harbor, on the one hand, and Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on the other. Many of you have no doubt also been struck by the difficulty of producing common memories and reconciliation between two nations that were once at war. It is starkly clear that there is still a thick wall of nationalism separating Japan and the United States.

However, the production of common memories must no doubt begin with recognition of our differences. I think the starting point will be a standpoint of recognizing the reasons for the differences in our memories -- that is, a standpoint of empathy. I think this symposium has at least brought us up to the starting line for the production of common memories by our success in confirming these differences.

To move forward in fostering transnational memories between Japan and the United States, it is important that we recognize the fact that victims of war cross national boundaries. The victims of the atomic bomb, for example, were not only Japanese but included global hibakusha such as Koreans, American soldiers and Native Americans at the sites of atomic tests, as well as Pacific Islanders.

Moreover, a reappraisal of the past will inevitably move forward, just as it has in Europe, as increasing regional cooperation and integration in the Asia-Pacific Region produces a regionalism going beyond nationalism. It is important for researchers in both Japan and the United States, rather than using the continued existence of a Cold War structure in Northeast Asia as a reason for inaction, to maintain the will to move forward with regional cooperation and integration, and to continue pursuing exchanges for this purpose. I hope that this symposium has served as a first step in that direction.